



File Code: 1950
Date: May 3, 2018

Dear Interested Parties:

The Wisdom Ranger District on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) is proposing to remove conifers on six units for a total of 1,060 acres along Highway 43 and Forest Service road 106. The project is located in the Trail Creek Management Area, approximately 15 miles west of Wisdom, MT; Township one South, Range nineteen West, Sections 24 and 25, Beaverhead County. The Trail Creek Grasslands Conifer removal project falls in two Roadless areas: 127 acres in Elk Creek, and 130 acres in Anderson Mountain.

Background

The Trail Creek area provides high-quality summer calving and transition habitat for elk and summer and winter habitat for moose and other wildlife. Vegetation in this Management Area may be managed by fire or timber harvest to reduce fuels, or to provide wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and other values. Trail Creek Management Area has a concentration of nationally designated historic features of the Lewis and Clark historic trail, and the Nee-Me-Poo trail. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Revised Forest Plan (FP) includes an objective to "Reduce conifer encroachment on 74,000 acres of riparian areas, shrub lands and grasslands" (FP p.44).

Purpose and Need

We seek to improve riparian vegetation structure and composition along the Trail Creek area, proactively removing expanding conifers in this area would ensure this valuable riparian shrub/willow component is maintained and allowed to improve overtime. Removing conifers will have a positive effect on forb production and maintain the grassland and willow habitat. Along with maintaining habitat integrity this project will aid in the historic landscape preservation of the nationally designated historic features of the management area. Efforts will focus on thinning conifers 8" diameter at breast height and under, utilizing chainsaws and hand nippers. Areas of high concentrations of conifers may be cut and/or burned. Areas of dispersed conifers may be lopped and scattered. High concentrations of small trees may be jackpot burned or broadcast burned to ensure the removal of conifers with minimal impact to existing willow plants.

Proposed Action

The project area consists of 6 units with a combined size of 1,060 acres where conifers are expanding into grassland and willow riparian areas. These areas are all shortgrass parks with no sagebrush. Crews will engage in mechanical thinning to cut down conifer seedlings and saplings in areas shown on the attached map. This work is expected to occur in July through October for approximately 40 days/year. Crews will access these units by walking in from roads. The majority of the conifer expansion is dispersed and will be lopped and scattered, slashed and/or piled, then Jack-pot burned. In areas of high concentration of conifers, broadcast burning may occur, targeting conifers. The slash will be burned within the following two years. The preferred



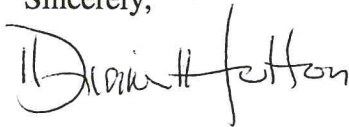
time of year for burning of the slash and prescribed burning will be in the early summer and fall when site conditions are within prescription. This will help minimize impacts to soil, vegetation, and keep the threat of fire spread outside the units to a minimum. Adequate burn windows and weather will determine when burning will occur. This area was removed from cattle grazing in 2005. All five-needle pines will be left, regardless of size, to help promote regeneration of Whitebark pine. Completion of this project is expected to take two to six years. Coordination with the local FS District Biologist and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks area Biologist in the spring will ensure project activities are conducted after big game calving season.


How to Comment

Please share your comments, concerns, or ideas with Molly Ryan, District Ranger, at the Wisdom Ranger District, at 300 Forest Service Rd. Wisdom, Mt 59761. She can also be reached by phone at 406-689-3243, or by fax at 406-689-3245. If you prefer, send your comments electronically to comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge@fs.fed.us and type **Trail Creek Grassland Conifer Removal** in the subject line.

Your comments are welcome anytime, but will be most helpful if they are submitted by June, 05, 2018. Comments in response to this solicitation, including names, postal and email addresses and phone numbers, will be considered part of the public record, and available for public review. If you do not respond to this letter you will receive no further information. However, you may always find information about this and other Forest projects on the web at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bdnf/projects under the Forest Projects heading

Sincerely,



 MOLLY RYAN
District Ranger

Enclosure